

G889#11 South

by the frog princess

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Summary: Eleventh in the AS G-889 TURNS saga. Eden Project faces a decision.

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As G-889 Turns

> Episode #11 "South?"
 by the frog princess

(Inspired by the television program Earth2.)

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> WARNING: This is a continuing soap opera. If you haven't read the prior installments of the As G-889 Turns saga yet, this will make no sense whatsoever.

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> <p> "I'm sorry," Cameron apologized yet again. <p>

If she'd been having a better day, Julia would have said something reassuring. It wasn't your fault. You couldn't have known. We were going to run out of the things anyway. As it was, she just stared at the empty case in front of her and glowered. It had once been filled with vials of sedatives, enough, supposedly, to last them until the colony ship arrived. How many sedatives was a small advance team expected to use anyway?

"I'm--" Cameron began, but stopped as soon as Julia re-directed her gaze at him.

Julia surveyed the bad joke that passed as the med tent. She didn't have half the supplies she'd needed when she'd started this voyage. Now she didn't even have that. There was nothing but a lab table of random equipment, a cylinder that didn't bear thinking about, a few milliliters of Grendler drool, and in the far corner on a cot the snoring carcass of her pilot slash ex-boyfriend--into whom Cameron

had recently pumped their last sedaderm.

A noise from outside the tent distracted her from her thoughts. The day's main event was in full swing.

"But, Dad!" True pleaded.

"Decision final!" John grunted, dodging left.

"There he goes!" Walman yelled.

"But..."

"Look out," Elisha Denner squealed, whirling right and side-stepping over Roberto Mazatl's lifeless form. She'd already left one boot print on the poor thing's posterior and was trying her best to avoid additional abuse.

"Baines is down," Lenina Magus announced, shaking her head as the young man crumpled and pitched into the dirt. "If you could just herd him towards the net...."

"We're trying!!!" John and Walman shouted.

"He's over there," Uly yelled excitedly. From his vantage point, high in a tree, Uly was getting a great show as the adults scrambled frantically around the camp. He hadn't had this much fun, ever.

"He didn't mean to do anything wrong. Dad, you're scaring him."

John ignored his daughter's continued rationalizations and followed Uly's pointing finger.

"Easy now," he muttered. "Almost got him."

Picking up a stick of wood off the ground, John slowly crept up on the little koba. Swinging it high with both hands, he aimed.

"Dad!!!" True screamed in horror.

Warned, the creature dashed under the transrover.

"True!" John shouted in disgust.

"You were gonna kill him!" True yelled accusingly.

John sighed and looked heavenward for a moment. He tried counting to ten, but before he got to four, he rounded on his little girl. "We will do what we have to do get rid of this thing! Now go over there out of the way!"

"But..."

"NOW!!!"

Huffing indignantly, True stalked over to where Morgan and Yale were

watching the activities from a safe distance.

Uly laughed giddily at her misfortune. "True is in trouble," he sang snottily.

"Ulysses!" John barked. "Not one more word!"

Uly was instantly silent. He no longer felt the slightest bit giddy either. It wasn't so much John Danziger's rough tone of voice as it was the unusual form of address. It was just a reminder that the big mechanic was still not quite himself.

Elisha, meanwhile, had fired up the transrover and was slowly driving the koba's hiding place away from him. Walman and Lenina closed in with the net and John, stick in hand, returned to help.

"It's not fair," True sulked, trying not to let anyone see the tears forming in her eyes. "Skippy didn't mean to do anything wrong. He was just doing what comes naturally."

"Which in Skippy's case means nibbling on people," Morgan added.

True huffed again, but Yale interrupted before she could say anything more.

"True, this isn't about whether Skippy did anything wrong. We said we were only going to keep him until he was old enough to take care of himself. And obviously," (Yale couldn't quite suppress a chuckle as he watched Skippy fire one of his few remaining claws into John's fanny) "he's perfectly capable of taking care of himself."

With a shout of triumph, Walman and Lenina hoisted Skippy high in their net. The shout turned to a groan as Walman slumped to the ground and the koba tumbled free.

"We'll get him," John mumbled from where he lay face down in the dirt, fast succumbing to the koba venom. "He's runnin' out of claws."

"And we're running out of people," Walman slurred back.

"SKIPPY!!!" Julia Heller yelled, loudly enough so that the entire camp (those that weren't already dead to the world, that is) froze. Julia hadn't been much for pleasantries lately. Yale suspected that she hadn't slept more than a few scattered hours since the night Bess Martin had collapsed. As she passed upwind of them, Morgan suspected she hadn't bathed since then either.

Spotting the tiny creature huddled behind a tree stump, Julia approached it. "Skiiiiippyyyyyy," she cooed softly.

Skippy perked up at the friendly voice. Eyeing Julia cautiously, he waddled out from behind his tree stump.

"Were the big bad men bothering you?" Julia asked, squatting down to koba level and opening her arms invitingly.

Skippy almost seemed to nod as he ran into Julia's arms. Picking him up, she walked back to the med tent without a further word to anyone.

Walman and John watched as the light faded from their eyes. As one, they mouthed, "Aw, shit."

Three days later the conversation picked up right where it left off.

Leaning over her father's cot, True beamed, "So I can keep my cat?!"

"He's not your cat," John corrected groggily, still nursing a killer headache. "He's Julia's cat."

"Julia only wants him for his venom," True pointed out. "She doesn't have time to feed him or..."

The mere thought of food sent John's stomach roiling. Dammit, he could use some of the doctor's attention himself right now. He'd only had less than a day's worth of less-than-square meals in between his Alonzo-induced-coma and his koba-induced-coma and whatever else he didn't know, he was sure that wasn't healthy. If he had the strength he would have crawled to the med tent, but he suspected he'd be crawling over half the camp on the way.

"...love him or...."

"He's Julia's cat," John reiterated. "Once she's got him declawed and...."

"She declawed him yesterday."

"...and if it's okay with her, then you can play with him."

True attacked her father with a giant hug.

"But first," he groaned, already pained by what he was about to request.

"Yeah?" she asked hesitantly.

"Would you bring me some of that awful soup before I starve to death?"

"You mean the Walbert Root soup?"

John couldn't remember the name of it; wasn't sure he'd ever been told it even. "Vile smelling stuff?"

"It grows on you."

Alonzo wasn't quite sure what to make of his new roommate. Skippy was, at the moment, caged and clawless. Still, he kept looking at Alonzo and making smacking noises, which the pilot found unsettling.

"When are we going to move?" Alonzo asked.

"Hm?" Julia mumbled absently as she and Cameron huddled over her lab table.

"When are we going to strike camp and head south?"

"There," Julia said, a faint smile tracing along her tired face.

"That ought to do it. You think?"

Cameron nodded enthusiastically.

"Julia?" Alonzo prompted.

"Oh," she murmured, as if she'd just noticed the pilot in his cot.

"I'll be releasing you soon. That foot looks like it'll heal up fine. We just have one more mixture to test."

"You're using me as a lab rat!" Alonzo realized.

Cameron just smiled as he closed in with the sedaderm full of diluted koba venom.

Five days after Alonzo returned from his trip to never-never-land the vote was called. Tired, hurting, cranky, groggy, sad, and/or confused, the members of Eden Advance gathered before the fire. Half of them were nursing koba hangovers. All of them were still reeling from the so recent losses of Eben, Devon, and Bess. Alonzo's foot throbbed. Julia hadn't slept for as long as she could remember. Morgan was in full denial about everything. They had all reached the breaking point and now they had a decision to make. The question hung in the air.

South?

"I cannot believe we are even considering picking up and doing a nearly ninety degree veer off our course based on somebody's whacked out hallucinations." Walman stared at Alonzo as if he thought he could win his point by the sheer power of his gaze.

"It wasn't a hallucination," Alonzo insisted. "It was Bess."

"If it was Bess," Morgan asked the fire, "why didn't she talk to me?"

"She tried. She can't get through to you. She said you're always thinking too many contradictory thoughts. You're not at peace with yourself or the planet. She just can't break through your preconceived view of the world. She said she'd keep trying. You just have to relax and let it happen."

Morgan continued to watch the fire and remained uncharacteristically quiet. The mere idea that he might be able to see his Bess again soon, overwhelmed all other considerations.

"What proof do we have that this information is right?" Lenina asked quietly. "Even if it was Bess, how can she really know?"

"If it was Bess. If Bess can really communicate through the Terrian dreaming," Yale reasoned, "then she's more connected to this planet than any of us. Her knowledge would far surpass any of our surveys. The question isn't whether Bess's information is accurate. The question is whether it was Bess at all."

"It was," Alonzo insisted.

"Medical opinion?" Yale asked.

Julia threw up her hands. "I don't know. Given his mental condition at the time of this 'contact' it's perfectly likely that it was nothing more than an elaborate hallucination. But there's no medical basis for ruling out a contact from the dream plane."

"If we continue on our current path, we will reach this New Pacifica?" John asked.

"Yes," Yale agreed.

"Eventually," Alonzo added. "But there are more obstacles out there than we realize. It's going to take much longer than we've estimated. If we follow Bess's directions and go south to the spider nexus, we'll be there in no time."

"South through a swamp," Walman added. "Can you imagine trying to get the vehicles through swampland? And what about your precious Terrians? They won't be of any help in swampland."

"On the other hand," Yale pointed out. "That also means we don't have to worry about encroaching on their land."

"So what's the vote?" Lenina asked.

"South," Alonzo insisted.

"South," Morgan whispered shakily. Agreeing with Alonzo left a bad taste in his mouth but he could never risk turning his back on Bess.

"I say we stay on our present course," Walman said.

One by one, the rest of the group grunted their agreement with Walman. The way south was treacherous and held no assurance of even getting them to the right place. But an unexpected voice interrupted the voting.

"We go south."

It wasn't a statement of opinion. It wasn't a vote. It was an order.

Taken aback, they all grew silent and turned to look at the young boy.

"We came to this planet with a mission," Uly reminded them. "We came here to start a colony for sick children. If we don't get to New Pacifica before the other sick kids, then we've failed our mission. We can't tell Mom that we failed because we went the long way. It's our duty to go the fastest way. We go south."

They just stared at him in amazement. He didn't look anything like Devon Adair, but it was obvious that his mother's spirit was strong in him. This was what Devon would have wanted. It was so hard to argue with that simple, noble logic.

It was hard, but Walman tried anyway. "We can't just ..."

"We go south," John Danziger echoed, loudly, clearly, and staring Walman in the eye with his natural do-what-I-want-or-feel-pain look. Somewhere in the very farthest reaches of his mind, he was trying to conjure up a mental picture of "Mom". He couldn't see her face, but he instinctively knew that Uly was right. He could never tell that woman he hadn't been there to help her children because he hadn't tried hard enough.

There were no more arguments from anyone.

CONTINUED IN THE NEXT INSTALLMENT

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